

polar by aelescribe

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Summary:

Hopper hoped Eleven realized that this goodness was within her right. She deserved home; not just a home that's a place, but its people, its essence, its enveloping warmth. More than that, Hopper hoped he could help provide that for her in any way he could. Even if it just meant feeding her.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

There's no way Jim doesn't see any resemblance of Sarah in Eleven my dudes. Also Eleven deserves a good father and Jim is a Cool Dude and Rad Dad. I just have a lot of feelings for their potential father-daughter bond cuteness. May write a continuation of this along the same lines but with Joyce. I JUST WANT ELEVEN TO HAVE GOOD PARENTS SHE DESERVES THE WORLD

Hopper heard the box creak open. Snow crunching under sneakers. He strode toward his car, but he could not leave. He paused and let the cold settle into his bones. Hopper breathed. Counted to three. He prepared for another disappearing act. He was counting on his disappointment.

When he turned, there she was.

Eleven stared at him with wide eyes and a mouth full of waffles. She kept eating. She did not consider her lack of response or the loud smacking of her chapped lips rude. Neither did Hopper.

"Hey..." he started, then realized he had no idea what to say. The chief took a moment to let her appearance sink in. Eleven shivered. Her jacket was worn. Her hair began to curl around her ears, yet her scalp was adorned with bald, red patches. Her dress was dark and faded. Her shoes, washed with the cold of snow, were white as ever.

Eleven swallowed. Hopper saw a veteran with old eyes and soul betraying a more youthful face. Eleven finished the first waffle and continued with the second. He continued to stare.

He remembered her suspended in their improvised sensory deprivation tank. Ethereal and lifeless against the flow of the water. He thought she looked the same, blending into the snowfall, succumbing to the pull of nature. Though she stood before him, she was not quite there. Hopper thought it was a trick of his eye at first,

but shadows creped around the edge of her form. They nibbled her ankles, her wrists, her neck. She wiped them away with a carefree hand. Eleven nonchalantly walked the line between their world and the upside down.

As she finished the second waffle and stepped back, Hopper moved forward, hand outstretched. Not to startle her, but to give her pause. To invite her back into his world. "Don't go yet," he said. "Please."

She regarded him with brief distrust--it was more than earned; Hopper didn't trust himself, and why should she trust anybody at all after what she's been through?--but allowed it to melt, like the snowflakes on her trembling flesh, to levity.

He was still trying to sort out his words. Eleven saved him and finally spoke, "The others."

"They're all okay," he said. "Will's doing well. He's safe. All thanks to you. Without your help, he wouldn't be alive."

Her lips quirked. "You too." The chief gave a small smile back. A frown creased her brow. "Mike?" she whispered, and Hopper's heart broke. She sounded so lost, so hopeful, so full of so many emotions she had yet to or was never allowed to experience.

"He's fine. Mike misses you a lot. He's waiting for you to come home."

"Home." Eleven let the word linger in the winter air. Tasted it on her tongue. "Home," she repeated. She clasped her shuddering hands together with the smallest smile. Had she ever been able to use that word, Hopper wondered? Was that dark laboratory all she could consider home? He prayed that word was never used in her presence by Brenner, that its meaning was never so wrongfully conveyed. He hoped that this was the first time she heard it. That she would only hear it from him, or Joyce, or Mike, and think of the first kindnesses she ever received, and recognized it as what she deserved. Hopper hoped Eleven realized that this goodness was within her right. She deserved home; not just a home that's a place, but its people, its essence, its enveloping warmth. More than that, Hopper hoped he could help provide that for her in any way he could. Even if it just meant feeding her.

After a stretch of silence, Hopper inquired, "Why did you leave? I mean... why don't you come back? Things are safe now. Your father--Dr. Brenner--he can't hurt you anymore. No one can."

"Can't," she said, cryptic and soft.

"Why?" Hopper asked again.

"Only I can do this."

Hopper risked a few more steps towards her. "You don't have to hide anymore. There's no danger left. Or if there is, we can face it together."

She pointed at him. "I have to protect you. Will. Mike. Everyone."

The chief convinced himself the tears welling in his eyes was only because of the windchill. "You need--" He cleared his throat and composed himself. "You need to be protected, too. You can't take all this on by yourself. I've seen that place, that other world. It's impossible for just one person to handle."

Eleven shook her head. "I can."

But you shouldn't have to, Hopper wanted to scream. Eleven acted as a parent trying to shelter him from evil. That was not all Hopper saw from her. He saw a child shivering in the cold. He saw a girl with the weight of two worlds on her shoulders. He saw a victim wrought with abuse. He saw his daughter.

The picture he had from her file was enough to send chills down his spine. Seeing her for the first time in person was something else entirely. Her reserved nature, her quiet kindness, was all too familiar. It echoed all the memories of Sarah he had left. And even moreso lied within their shared spirit. Eleven was so strong, so clear, so driven. Her fragility was a misnomer. She was fighting for her life against impossible odds. The strength of gods, giants, and all unfathomable creatures proven real lived in her every movement. Hopper could not bear to see that struggle lost again.

"Promise me that you'll get me--or Mike, anyone, someone--if it's too much. We *want* to help you. We *can* help you. Really. I may not be

psychic, but I'm a pretty good shot."

Eleven's doubt gave way to a reluctant, sincere smile. "Okay."

He turned towards his car. "Don't leave," he said. "I have something for you."

Eleven raised an eyebrow. She shuffled cautiously behind Hopper. He got in his car and dug out an old set of matching hat and gloves. He held them with reverence, took a deep breath, and presented them to the girl. "They may be a bit small, but they should keep you warm."

She kneaded the fabric with her stiff fingers. Her eyes were full of awe. "Thank you." She slid the gloves on and clapped her hands together as the feeling in her joints began to return.

With her permission, Hopper gently slid the hat over Eleven's patchy, bleeding head, tucked behind her ears with wisps of curly hair. Snowflakes gathered in her eyelashes. Sarah came to mind once more. He held the thought, let it happen, and let it go.

"Take care of yourself," Hopper said.

Eleven nodded, solemn. "You too."

Hopper let her go. He watched her disappear with the snow, unsure of whether the weather obscured her or whether she actually vanished. He thought once more of his daughter and quickly turned back to his car.

Eleven would not succumb to whatever was out there, Hopper decided. "You hear me?" he growled to the woods. "You'll have to kill me first."

And off he drove into the winter night.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

“Hopper--” she whispers. Her voice strains. She can’t speak above the ringing in her ears.

A hand cradles her head, fingers brushing her bleeding ear. “Don’t you worry. He can’t hurt you anymore. It’s all right, I’m here. I’m here.”

Blood gushes from her nose, her ears, thickly coats her tongue. She holds it in, tries to swallow, but more rushes back up her throat. Eleven weakly vomits all over the ground. She shakes. The tears clinging to her lashes fall. She wants to push herself further, she’s trying, she’s pushing—pushing herself off the ground—pushing her mind farther—

Her hands slip and her head hits the floor. Eleven groans, squeezing out more tears. Her vision blurs and she is unsure of whether it’s from pain or the rain in her eyes. She’s gone too far this time. She can’t focus. All of her organs are banging against her insides, screaming to get out. She wants to scream too. All she can see is red. The elevator sways, making her ill again.

Mike, she thinks. She is desperate for his strength, his touch. She’s starved for even a glimpse of him, because that’s all she needs to get up again. But when she tries to conjure him in her mind, he’s dark shapes and muted colors and his voice doesn’t sound quite right. “Mike,” she breathes, coughing some more. “Mike...” She tries not to cry, each contraction of her chest sending shockwaves of pain throughout her body. “Anyone... help me...”

“No—“ A strong set of hands steadies her shoulders. “Eleven. Eleven, can you hear me? It’s me.”

She thinks she recognizes the figure through the haze and tries to form the words, *I’m okay, don’t worry about me* or *You need to get out of here* or *Are you okay you have to be okay please be okay*, but all she can do is whine. Slowly she’s raised from the floor, into his arms.

Stiff. Cold. Rising with the elevator. She squirms and her eyes stay shut tight. “Hopper--” she whispers. Her voice strains. She can’t speak above the ringing in her ears.

A hand cradles her head, fingers brushing her bleeding ear. “Don’t you worry. He can’t hurt you anymore. It’s all right, I’m here. I’m here.”

He rocks Eleven gently in his arms and she sobs. Her hands curl into his coat. “I couldn’t...the gate... I’m sorry...”

“It’s okay, Eleven, it’s okay. Don’t cry. I’m here, I’m going to take care of you. Papa’s here. There’s nothing to worry about.”

She thinks she heard wrong. She’s convinced it’s the ringing in her ears. She can’t trust her ears, but she knows she can trust her eyes, and with all the strength she can muster, they flutter open.

Dull walls greet her. Eleven chokes.

She violently convulses away from Brenner but he holds her tighter, shushes her. “Eleven, Eleven, calm down. You’re all right. You’re safe, now. I’m here.”

“Get away from me,” she growls. Blood seeps from her gums. “Get. Away.”

“Oh, that man nearly destroyed you,” Brenner whispers, pity in his voice. “But you were too strong for him, Eleven. He couldn’t stop you. And he won’t hurt you ever again.”

“Where is Hopper?” Eleven demands. Her Papa shakes in her vision. She’s angry. She’s scared. She’s full of pain. She’s shaking. Everything in her trembles. But none of that matters compared to Hopper. “I could hurt you,” she seethes. “I--”

“But you never will.” He gives a mocking shake of his head and laughs “You couldn’t do it then, and you can’t now. At the end of the day... you’re a child, Eleven. My child. I won’t hold this against you. You’re very, very sick.” He wipes the blood from her nose and ears with thinly veiled disgust and rests his hands firmly on her gaunt cheeks. “I’m going to make you better. Erase all of this hurt. Starting

with this.” He smoothes her curly hair with a frown.

“No--” Eleven shakes her head, seizes, coughs up more blood. “You can’t...”

“Eleven. I need you to focus for me. Can you do that?”

“Stop it.”

Hands grip either side of her head, forcing her to her feet. “Focus, Eleven.”

Her eyes settle on the two figures in front of her. On their knees, heads bent under the barrel of a gun, gagged. Hopper and Mike. “Let go of them.” Her will begins to waver and she bites her lip, hard. “Please. Let them go.”

“I’m giving you a *gift*, Eleven,” His hands squeezing her shoulders, her head, her neck, is all that is keeping her standing. Mike and Hopper are all that are keeping her awake. Every inch of her skin crawls with disgust and she is trying to use her powers, trying so hard, but she can hardly stay conscious. “You can choose one of them.”

Eleven is confused.

“You can choose which one of them gets to live.”

“Papa, stop it--” she begs. “Papa, please, don’t hurt them. Please. Please, please, please...”

“But they’ve hurt you, they’ve both hurt you terribly. They can’t get away with it.”

“*You* hurt me!” Eleven sobs. “You hurt me, Papa! You’re hurting me!”

“Eleven, my patience is wearing thin. I’m doing you a favor. Stop being a brat.” Brenner nods to one of the guards and he presses his gun to Mike’s temple.

“NO!” Eleven exclaims. Her vision darkens and she falls back against her Papa. He wraps one arm around her waist to keep her up, and the

other hand rests under her chin to keep her head steady.

“Was that so hard?” Brenner gently chides. “Let the boy go.”

The guard undoes Mike’s blindfold and gag. “Elle!” Mike yells, voice hoarse.

Eleven opens her mouth to say something and it morphs into a scream when the guard turns his attention from Mike to lodge a bullet in Hopper’s head. And Eleven doesn’t stop screaming. She can’t. Her powers are nothing and all she can do is scream while blood gushes from him, from her, and tears pour from her and Mike. And she sees his body already freezing before it hits the floor and she sees him dancing and she sees him irate with affection and she sees him giving her what he doesn’t think could ever be enough that she thinks is more than she deserves.

She even sees that black hole, smack in the middle of his forehead.

It all turns black.

“Elle!”

Eleven stays frozen, eyes wide and teary, entire body spasming. She hears him but she cannot respond. It’s too late. It’s her fault and it’s too late. She can’t breathe and she’s glad, she doesn’t deserve it, and how can she breathe air that will no longer be breathed by Hopper? Every mouthful afterward is stale and suffocating and she welcomes it, the end, with open arms.

“Look at me. Elle. Look at me, please, Elle.”

Wet. On her eyes. She’s crying again. No, it’s on her nose, her forehead, her cheek. She isn’t crying. Her eyes settle back into focus. The hand in her hair is comforting, smoothing back sweat dampened locks. It’s warm and loving.

“Can you hear me, Elle?” Hopper asks. He sniffs, hard, and beyond the tears on Eleven’s face there is no evidence to prove he’s been crying.

She nods. “Where... where am I?”

"You're safe, Elle. You're in bed. You're home. You... you were having a nightmare." He clears his throat, trying to regain some composure. "You were screaming, and--you wouldn't stop twitching and I couldn't wake you up--"

"Nightmare," Eleven repeats. Waves of pain and familiar fear rush back to her. She bursts into a fresh round of tears and wrenches away from Hopper's touch.

Hopper watches her for a long moment. "Come on," he says. "Let's get you some fresh air."

Through her sadness, she musters up a disapproving frown. "But you said--"

"I know what I said. But we're stupid, remember?" He offers a smirk.

Eleven manages a short laugh. She wraps a blanket around herself and lets Hopper lead her outside. He does not touch her and she is grateful. She's too afraid that she'll turn at the slightest brush of his hand and see Papa. She settles on the front porch steps and, under Hopper's instruction, breathes in and out very slowly. The fresh air is cool, a little too cold, and she's grateful for it.

He doesn't push her to talk, but she can sense his curiosity--no, that's not it. It's his worry for her, his need to know what to do to make this right. To make her feel at ease. To make her happy.

Eleven is overwhelmed. Her heart is full, so painfully full.

"Papa," she said at last. "He... he made me choose. You or Mike. And he-- you--" She buries her head in her hands and her breath stutters.

"Hey, hey, come on. It's all right. Breathe with me."

"He *killed* you," Eleven says. She stares at his forehead and gently touches his brow, prodding for the hole that was never there. "He killed you, and it was *my* fault."

Hopper grasps Eleven's hand, squeezes her tiny fingers. "It was not your fault. It was a dream. It was not, will not, ever be your fault."

“But I--”

“No buts, kid. Not your fault. Don’t even think it.”

“I could get you *killed*,” she finally snaps. “You could die and it could be my fault!”

Hopper lets out a long sigh. “Yeah, I could die. Brenner could shoot me full of holes. One of those stupid dogs could get me, tear me limb from limb. I could trip and slice my head open on that tripwire. *You* could even kill me.”

Eleven shudders, drawing into herself. “I don’t understand.”

“I could die any number of ways, and it would never be your fault.”

“Even if I killed you?”

Hopper shrugs. “I mean, I’d be understandably pissed. Probably come back and bug you as a ghost.”

But I can’t stay mad at you.

Eleven tries not to smile. At last, she leans into Hopper, latching onto his side under his arm. He freezes at first, but Eleven is insistent. Eventually his arm wraps around her, pulling her in closer. He kisses her forehead. They listen to the forest and watch the moon give way to the rising sun.

“We should go back inside,” Eleven says, the first to break the silence, though reluctant. “It’s light out.”

“I’ll start breakfast.” Hopper pats the top of her head and goes back inside.

Eleven lingers on the steps a moment longer. A cold wind rushes over her and she thinks of Papa, his clawing hands, his dark eyes. She’s still scared.

But she lets the thought go.

Notes for the Chapter:

Going to keep adding tags as they become relevant to the story. I have a lot of feelings about Hopper and Eleven's relationship so I'll just dump them all here. This one's a bit darker than the last one. Whoops! Hope you enjoy, comments are very much appreciated <3

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

Hopper stared at the blue hair tie around Eleven's thin wrist. He surprised himself by giving it to her. She surprised herself by accepting it. Whether they liked it or not (and they did, they really did, even if they fought sometimes) they were family.

Hopper pulled into the parking lot of the police station just like he did every morning, at the same time as always, with a new sense of fear. Not fear, perhaps. Apprehension. Of course he was a man always on edge, always careful, for himself as well as others.

Eleven sat next to him, hands folded politely in her lap. She fiddled with her seatbelt, waiting for Hopper's cue to unbuckle.

"Are you sure you're ready for this?" He asked softly.

Eleven was nervous, but she managed to roll her eyes. "This is the best day to do it. And... I don't want to wait another year. Even if I did, I don't think I could."

Hopper gave her shoulder a squeeze. "I know. I wouldn't want you to. Just as long as you're ready."

"You don't seem ready," Eleven said cautiously. Not challenging, just observing.

Hopper swallowed hard, returning his hand to the steering wheel for stability. "No. I don't think I ever could be. Maybe neither of us are." Hopper stared at the blue hair tie around Eleven's thin wrist. He surprised himself by giving it to her. She surprised herself by accepting it. Whether they liked it or not (and they did, they really did, even if they fought sometimes) they were family. Ever since he saw her standing on that snow embankment.

They sat in silence for another long minute. "No point in waiting," Eleven finally said. She unbuckled and hovered her hand over the car

door handle.

Hopper watched her with a smile. She couldn't wait. He was scared, sure. But he knew how much he wanted this. He wanted it too. It was just scary to open that door again. Though it was easier when Eleven was so excited, so eager, to share herself as part of his life to others.

"Yeah. Let's go."

Hopper took her by the hand, brushed his fingers over that precious blue, and they walked into the station.

They were greeted in the station by lots of noise. They passed a banner, once bright letters faded by now, that read "Happy Annual Bring Your Daughter To Work Day". Girls of all ages and their parents were milling about the station, enjoying a table full of sweets set out especially for the day.

"Hopper!" Powell greeted, waving him over. He regarded his young companion with an inquisitive frown. "Who's this?"

Eleven squeezed his hand, support and comfort for them both.

"Powell, I'd like you to meet Jane." His chest swelled with pride and he couldn't help but beam, "She's my daughter."

Notes for the Chapter:

I wanted to post something short and sweet. Also I like the idea of Hopper's colleagues all being baffled by this 13 year old girl he never mentioned that's his daughter.